A guide to the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Going to Confession

Many people have avoided celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation, sometimes for years at a time, because they "don't know what to do." The following brief explanation is intended for a person who has not been to confession in some time. It explains how the first form of the Sacrament of Reconciliation may be celebrated. The person who is going to confession is called a "penitent" because he or she wishes to do penance and to turn away from sin.

Preparation

Before going to confession, the penitent compares his or her life with the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, the example of Christ or an other examination of conscience as follows, and then prays to God for forgiveness.

Approaching Confession

The priest welcomes the penitent and then both make the sign of the cross, saying, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen." Next the priest briefly urges the penitent to have confidence in God.

The penitent may begin with the traditional greeting: **"Forgive me Father, for I have sinned. It has been** *(length of time)* **since my last confession.* My sins are as follows:"**

**If the penitent is unknown to the priest, it is proper for the penitent to indicate his or her state of life (e.g., married, single, widowed, etc.), difficulties in leading the Christian life and anything else that may help the confessor in exercising his ministry.*

Confession of Sins

The penitent then confesses his or her sins. If necessary, the priest should help the penitent to make a complete confession and to have sincere sorrow for sins against God. The sorrow a penitent feels for his or her sins is known as contrition and must include a resolve to sin no more and to avoid all future occasions of sin. Through confession of sins, the penitent "looks squarely at the sins he is guilty of, takes responsibility for them, and thereby opens himself again to God and to the communion of the Church in order to make a new future possible."

The priest then offers suitable advice and gives a penance…

…to help the penitent begin a new life and, when appropriate, to lead him or her to resolve to make appropriate restitution for the harm he or she has caused others. The priest imposes a **penance** or satisfaction on the penitent. The penance corresponds to the seriousness and nature of the sins and may suitably take the form of prayer, self-denial, and especially service to one's neighbor and works of mercy. Such a "penance" serves not only to make up for the past but also to help the penitent to begin a new life and provides the penitent with an antidote to weakness.

The Act of Contrition

After this, the penitent prays a prayer expressing sorrow for his or her sins and resolves not to sin again. The penitent may recite the prayer by heart, read it or compose one on their own.

Here is one example of the Act of Contrition:

My God,
I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.
In choosing to do wrong
and failing to do good,
I have sinned against you
whom I should love above all things.
I firmly intend, with your help,
to do penance,
to sin no more,
and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.
Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and
died for us.
In his name, my God, have mercy.

Absolution by the Priest

Following this prayer, the priest extends his hands and pronounces the prayer of absolution. As he says the final words he makes the sign of the cross over the head of the penitent. At the same time the penitent also signs him or herself with the sign of the cross.

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Dismissal of the Penitent

Then the priest tells the penitent to go in peace. The penitent continues his or her conversion and expresses it by a life renewed according to the Gospel and more and more steeped in the love of God, for "love covers over a multitude of sins" (1 Pt 4:8)

An Examination of Conscience

The following list of capital sins, root sins, from our tradition, with the fears that cause them and the symptoms they manifest, may help us examine our lives in a way that is more meaningful. For most of us who do not have death-bringing choices to confess, the recognition of some of these root areas of concern will be the best way to admit our sinfulness, and help us discover the areas of our lives that need the most attention, and most need the healing touch of God's grace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Because God's call from fear to love is a journey involving the cross and death, most of us want to choose an easier way to new life. Most of us want Easter without Good Friday. All sin is an attempt to avoid the cost. All sin is substitution for real growth and real joy. Our tradition says the following are some of our most common substitutions.

1.Pride

When we:

- fear that we do not measure up;
- fear that we are not as good as others;
- fear that we will be found out;
- fear the brokeness that is in us and have never learned to forgive it;
- fear the weakness that is in us;
- choose false pride and arrogance;
  we substitute false pride for the quiet love and respect for self.

Symptoms of false pride are:

- we demand too much of self and others;
- we give in to the "tyranny of the shoulds" always saying what we or others "should" or "should not" have done;
- we judge ourselves and others too quickly and too harshly;
- we are vain about appearance or a particular gift;
- we have to be first;
- we have to be center;
- we believe our way is the only way;
- we brag too much;
- we exaggerate too much;
- we dominate and need to control.

Lord, for sins of pride we ask forgiveness.

2. Greed/Covetousness

When we:

- fear that people will not love us for who we are;
- fear that we will be judged;
- fear that we will not be safe;
- fear that God will not provide;
  we give in to greed and covetousness, we cover our insecurities in our own eyes and in the supposed feelings of others with material possessions.

Symptoms of greed are:

- we become too attached to possessions;
- we allow our possessions to own us, not us them;
- we work too hard;
- we keep too fast a pace;
- we do not keep holy the Lord's Day and do not make room for God in our life;
- we hoard money;
- we do not share enough with the poor;
- we might give in to stealing or dishonesty;
- we have no time for God or prayer;
- we have "strange gods before us" as the first commandment warns can happen
- we do not have time for parents or family.

Lord, for sins of greed we ask forgiveness.

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3. Lust

When we:
- fear being intimate in the true sense;
- fear to trust another;
- fear to entrust ourselves to another;
  we substitute lust, we give in to lust.

Symptoms of lust are:
- we turn people into objects;
- we use people;
- we lie to ourselves about relationships;
- we focus on pleasure rather than joy;
- we substitute physical intimacy for real loving intimacy;
- we turn to adultery or fornication
- we turn to pornography;
- we give in to sensuality;
- we allow sexuality to turn us inward rather than to relationship;
- we never learn to trust.

Lord, for sins of lust we ask forgiveness.

4. Anger

When we:
- fear being hurt;
- fear being controlled;
- fear not being liked;
- fear being judged;
- fear being found out;
- fear being taken for granted;
  we turn to anger at self, others and God.

Symptoms of anger are:
- we are impatient with self;
  we are impatient with others;
  we are unforgiving of self and others;
  we are unable to pray;
  we lack gentleness;
  we feel that we have been cheated;
  we have an impetuous spirit;
  we curse or use bad language;
  we use God's name improperly and without respect;
- we are impatient on the highways;
- we can become cold and cynical.

Lord, for sins of anger we ask forgiveness.

5. Gluttony

When we:
- fear to face ourselves;
- fear to face our problems;
- fear dealing with others;
- fear being overwhelmed;
  we turn to gluttony/drunkenness.

Symptoms of gluttony are:
- we eat too much;
- we eat too often;
- we eat to solve problems;
- we turn to drugs;
- we commit "adultery with the bottle":
  gaining strength, courage and meaning in life, in food or drink or drugs rather than in relationships.

Lord, for sins of gluttony we ask forgiveness.

6. Envy/Jealousy

When we:
- fear not looking good;
- fear being judged;
- fear we are missing out;
- fear life is passing us by;
  we turn to envy or jealousy.

Symptoms of envy are:
  we have a suspicious spirit;
  we criticize too much;
  we entertain sinful desires;
  we feel cheated;
  we "covet" neighbors' success;
  we put others down;
  we gossip too much;
  we give in to slander.

Lord, for sins of envy we ask forgiveness.

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7. Sloth/Laziness

When we:

- fear the cost of trying;
- fear hard work;
- fear the cost of relationships;
- fear failure;
- fear being hurt;

  we turn to sloth.

Symptoms of sloth are:

- we withdraw from life;
- we set no ideals;
- we quit before we finish;
- we set no goals;
- we never reach out;
- we do not use talents for God or others.

Lord, for sins of sloth we ask forgiveness.

